GEORGE ALLEN MANIPULATES the moods on "Whistler" chiller. Important innovation made by producer Allen when he first took over the show was to put the denouement in dramatic form. Formerly it had been delivered as monologue by "Whistler." (CBS photo.)

"Whistler" Producer DOESN'T Tell All

THIS IS THE ACTOR who interprets "The Whistler." As an aid to dramatic illusion, the producer guards the name of the interpreter of the role, concedes that the actor is heard on other networks and other shows.

Genial George Allen, Producer of "The Whistler," Knows Radio Plus. Only Fact He Won't Reveal Is Identity of Actor Who Plays Part of "Whistler."

By Joan Buchanan

Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.
CBS-KNX-KSDJ

EVER WONDER just why a producer casts a certain actor in a certain role? The fine points of casting a dramatic script being completely out of our province, we were happy for the opportunity to catalogue the opinions held by ace producer George Allen. Mr. Allen holds the reins on everybody's favorite, "The Whistler," one of the many shows in radio that depends upon strong dramatic performances to put across its punchy plot. "'The Whistler' lead carries the whole show on his back," admits Mr. Allen. "The show is cast for *realism*. The realism of the performances must make the audience say to itself, 'There, but for the grace of God, go I!'" Being able to put across this chilling conclusion has been responsible for the program's popularity, thinks Allen. The actors upon whom capturing and retaining the mood depends are, as often as not, better than their scripts.

Admitting that the Hollywood woods are full of fine performers and great character actors, Allen points to a handful who are "in a class by themselves," and gives his very interesting reason for the choices. Here's his list:

"**Elliott Lewis.** Elliott can sound like the average guy under pressure. He builds emotion fast and has the ability to hold it at a peak. He can make quick adjustments and still sound genuine.

"**Joe Kearns.** Joe is another actor who sounds natural. He is perfect in the more mental parts — professors, doctors. He's adept at portraying the good-brain-plotting-his-moves type of part. He also sees the panorama of the whole play, not just his own part.

"**Betty Lou Gerson.** She is particularly adept at parts that convey mental superiority . . . as a woman reporter, for instance. She's perfect for slightly superior women who

(Please Turn to Page 15)

Betty Lou Gerson

Hans Conried

John Brown

Gerald Mohr

Elliott Lewis

Cathy Lewis

Wally Maher

Alan Reed

Lurene Tuttle

WorldRadioHistory

Participation

Thursday, March 25—"Queen for a Day," KHJ, 12:30 p.m. (30 min.) A Red Cross Queen will be chosen on this program. House-to-house solicitors for the 1948 fund-raising campaign will be eligible to attend the broadcasts, provided they reach goals set for collection. "Majors" and "Captains" of the drive may also attend, as well as "Division Colonels." Contact local Red Cross headquarters for details.

★ ★

Booked for Passage

Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Bergen, accompanied by their daughter, Candice, will sail June 5 on the new Swedish-American liner, "S.S. Stockholm," to spend two months in northern Europe and the Scandinavian countries.

Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd will accompany the Bergens on their vacation tour. Charlie is already brushing up on his Swedish to play a scheduled command performance for the Swedish royal family. Edgar and Charlie also plan an extended stay in Germany to entertain U.S. occupation troops.

★ ★

Kickapoo Joy Juice, Inc.

Jean Hersholt's fan-mail indicates that many of his listeners regard CBS's "Dr. Christian" as a real-life M.D. Typical of this trust was a recent communication from Kentucky, which read:

"Dear Dr. Christain: I have develuped a wonderfull new oil which cures mity near anything backake kidney trouble stomake missery, etc. Just rub it on and presto. I would like to make a deal for you to turn this out as Dr. Christain's Miracel Oil. We will split 50 50. Lots of fokes here use my oil some of them are drinkin it too. It dont tast bad spiked with corn."

★ ★

Receives Award

For the "most hours of children's programming with approved material," KGIL has received a P.-T.A. award. Howard Thompson conducts the Monday-through-Friday "Children's Hour" from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. which merited the approbation.

"Whistler" Producer Doesn't Tell All

(Continued from Page 7)

have catty, fencing dialogue. She's also a fine 'enigma' — a character who fronts one situation while she's really something else.

"Wally Maher. Wally has the quick touch. He can be emotional in a flash. He makes a perfect blow-top. He can make his character sound very natural, with an undercurrent of emotion.

"John Brown. John is a top dramatic man. When I need him in a cast, I really *need* him. His dramatic portrayals are unique because he brings all his fine *comedy* technique in pacing and dialogue into play, and the listener doesn't realize it. Alan Reed, who also does many clever comedy roles, has this same quality in drama. They are both right for roles of newspaper men, cynics, critics.

"Hans Conried. He's in a class by himself! He does so many roles on so many shows that you don't often think of him as a straight lead. He's particularly right for a 'Whistler' straight lead with tangents. That is, a lead with two faces . . . a split personality. Any part that requires very subtle innuendoes calls for Hans.

"Gerry Mohr. I enjoy casting Gerry carefully. He has an unusual air quality of 'sexiness.' He can make his character seem physically attractive to listeners. He is also able to do extreme characters well—either very sophisticated types or complete mugs.

"Lurene Tuttle. Lurene hasn't been on the show recently—she's so busy. As an actress, she can *be* anything . . . assume any mental pose you call for. She may change her performance on the air as she finds another facet of the character in bringing it to life. The change is always for the better. She picks out the parts of her characterization that didn't ring right in rehearsal and corrects them.

"Cathy Lewis. She has the same qualities as Elliott. She is the female counterpart of the 'average guy' in her ability to sound absolutely genuine."

Keeps "Whistler" Illusion

George Allen finished his recital of actors and acting and smiled as he anticipated the next question. "And the 'Whistler,'" we added casually, "may we tell our readers who plays that part?"

"I think *illusion* is important to any show. If you knew that the sinister, omniscient 'Whistler' was just an actor named Joe Doakes, there wouldn't be any illusion—just play-acting. Really, no one is supposed to know who he is, outside of the people on the program."

During the war, "The Whistler" left radio to become a member of the armed forces. Allen revealed that several other actors did the part during that time, but that none of them was quite as effective as the original. "Our 'Whistler' can't be replaced by just anyone speaking on a filter mike," Allen said. "He's got a 'built-in filter' in his throat, besides."

The producer doesn't think that his program is concerned in the contention (often brought up in our "Ear Inspires" column) that casting the same actors destroys suspense in a show. During the "Big Annie" sessions at CBS when "The Whistler" transcriptions were played for listener-critics, this particular criticism was once brought up, Allen recalled. Other fans at the session quickly defended "Whistler" portrayals. The producer tries not to cast the same actors within a three or four-week period. Even if he did, he knows that the "double-twist" endings on the program would make it impossible for the audience to guess the outcome through a type-casting tip-off. Nothing pleases the producer more than knowing that part of his audience sits down each week to outwit the scripters. He often gets letters from fans who exclaim, "I thought I had the outcome nailed right this week, but you surprised me again." "We know that many of the listeners play the game along with us, and we love to have them do it," he smiled.

Writing Is Demanding

Satisfying as it is to pull off a double-twist ending, Allen admits that it's also very demanding. "We don't pull our twists out of left field. We try to make them surprising, but *logical*. Two-thirds of the scripts submitted don't have a 'Whistler' ending. We have to dream those up ourselves." The writers of the show, Harold Swanton and Joel Malone, write every fourth script you hear on the program. In addition, they rewrite and rebuild submitted scripts into the "Whistler" pattern. On the average, thirty-five scripts a week are received by the program—"We're fortunate if *one* is usable." The writers find that they have become a sort of directional current indicating the subject matter of submitted scripts. If they write a broadcast around a body in a trunk they find that several mail deliveries bring them a neat stack of scripts concerning bodies in trunks. This arrangement is all right with producer Allen. If he needs scripts of a certain type, Swanton and Malone do one and alert contributors supply the rest.

Suspenseful Hobby

Allen calls his chores on "The Whistler" his favorite hobby. He is also on deck at CBS as commercial program director of the Columbia Pacific Network and station KNX. Before CBS, Allen was with New York's WCBS, before that with the big agencies and before *that* producer of the Ed Wynn, Lanny Ross and Gertrude Berg shows. "And before that with the 'Tony and Gus' show, 'Show Boat' and 'Palmolive Beauty Box Theater.' Is that far enough back for you?" he laughed.

When Allen speaks of his present show he becomes like a fond parent with a clever child. He beams if you tell him you missed last week's denouement on the show and have been going mad trying to find out *what happened*. His favorite anecdote about the show concerns the night the lines between Bakersfield and KNX broke down just as the listening audience was about to learn what happened to a man who was trying to dispose of his wife's body. Anxious Bakersfieldians swamped the station, demanding to have their suspense put to an end. One fan, who had been listening directly to station KNX in Hollywood, phoned in to the Bakersfield station and related "The Whistler" ending. An announcer went on the air and told the finish of the story to the waiting audience!

WorldRadioHistory